

April 2006
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CHICAGO SCHOOL RESEARCH
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Report Highlights

INTRODUCTION

One of the most dramatic changes in education over the past several decades has been the rise in educational aspirations of youth. In 2005, fully 78 percent of twelfth-graders in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) stated on a Consortium survey that they hoped to complete a bachelor's degree or higher, and an additional 14 percent hoped to attain a two-year or vocational degree. These high aspirations, reflecting a changed economy, present a new challenge to high schools. How can high schools build on these aspirations and translate them into access to and success in college and other postsecondary experiences?

The mantra of "college for all" has become increasingly common in high school reform. Until recently, however, few high schools have been able to assess their performance and track their progress because few high schools knew the postsecondary outcomes of their graduates. In 2003, CPS established the Department of Postsecondary Education in the Office of High School Programs. The Department of Postsecondary Education has instituted an array of new initiatives aimed at providing guidance, academic enrichment opportunities, and financial resources to students, parents, and high schools. As part of these initiatives, CPS began to address the problem of too little information on post-high school outcomes by tracking the postsecondary plans and participation of its graduates and developing new school- and system-level reports on postsecondary outcomes.

From High School to the Future:

A first look at
Chicago Public
School graduates'
college enrollment,
college preparation,
and graduation from
four-year colleges

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The Consortium on Chicago School Research has begun a multiyear study, *From High School to the Future*, which supports CPS's postsecondary initiatives by systematically examining the college experiences and performance of CPS graduates. This is the first report from the Consortium's research project. It establishes a baseline of where CPS was as a school system prior to the creation of the Department of Postsecondary Education. It is intended to provide individual schools and the school system with a better understanding of what matters most in shaping students' postsecondary choices and experiences so that high school educators can better determine which strategies to use to improve their students' postsecondary outcomes. We focus on some very basic questions:

- How many CPS graduates are going to college? Where are they going, and how does that differ by race/ethnicity, gender, and high school attended?
- How prepared are CPS graduates for college, and how does this shape their access to different types of colleges?
- How many CPS students graduate from four-year colleges within six years of high school graduation?

The report is divided into three chapters, each focusing on one of these three areas of analysis. Chapter 1 presents a descriptive overview of the college-going rates and patterns of CPS graduates, as well as how those rates differ by students' demographic characteristics and across high schools in the city. In the second chapter, we begin to look at the question of what matters for college access. We look at CPS graduates' ACT scores, grade point averages (GPAs), and levels of participation in rigorous coursework (e.g., honors, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate). In Chapter 3, we examine the final step in the college attainment process: graduation from a four-year college. We provide a first look at the graduation rates from four-year colleges of an earlier cohort of CPS students in the six years after their high school graduation.

CHAPTER ONE

College-Attendance Rates and College-Going Patterns of Chicago Public School Graduates

In the spring of 2005, CPS's Department of Postsecondary Education released the first in a series of annual reports that provide individual high schools with information on the postsecondary enrollment of their graduates using data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC). In this report, we expand upon CPS's initial look at the college-going patterns of its graduates by analyzing data from two earlier cohorts: the graduating classes of 2002 and 2003.¹ Currently, NSC data include approximately 91 percent of students enrolled in college in the United States. NSC data most likely covers a higher proportion of CPS's college enrollment because most colleges in Illinois participate in NSC, and at present, most CPS graduates attend colleges in Illinois. At the high end, we estimate that NSC data will fail to include approximately 5 percent of CPS graduates who may indeed be enrolled in college.

College-going rates of CPS graduates

Approximately 59 percent of CPS graduates from the classes of 2002 and 2003 enrolled in a college that participated in the NSC by the spring after their graduation from high school. Among CPS students who attended college, approximately 39 percent enrolled in two-year colleges and 61 percent enrolled in four-year colleges.

College-going rates in CPS vary significantly by race/ethnicity and gender. Asian students were the most likely to attend college and the most likely to attend a four-year college. Latino graduates, on the other hand, were the least likely to attend college, particularly four-year colleges. Female graduates had higher college-going rates than male graduates in every racial/ethnic group, but the gap was most pronounced among African-American students.

The rate of enrolling in two-year colleges is similar across racial/ethnic groups and gender. The gap in overall college attendance is caused by differences in graduates' likelihood of

enrolling in a four-year college.

African-American, white, and Asian CPS graduates attend college at only slightly lower rates than their racial/ethnic counterparts nationwide. The gap for Latino students is more substantial. With the exception of Latinos, the percentage of CPS graduates who enrolled in college by the fall after high school graduation is only slightly lower than estimates of the college enrollment rates of students of the same race/ethnicity in Illinois and nationally. The largest gap in the college-going rates of CPS graduates versus graduates elsewhere occurs among Latino students. The Census Bureau estimates that overall, half (55 percent) of Latino graduates in 2002 and 2003 enrolled in college by the fall after graduation. Estimates based on the NSC suggest that approximately 46 percent of Latino graduates in Illinois and 41 percent of Latino graduates in CPS did so.

College-going patterns of CPS graduates

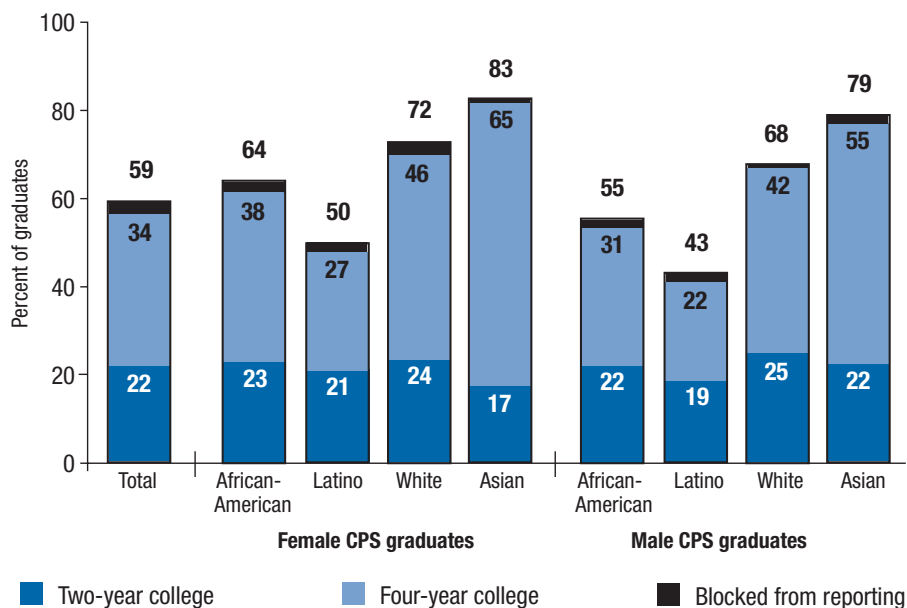
CPS graduates attend a very limited number of in-state colleges and are concentrated in two-year and non-selective four-year colleges. More than half of CPS graduates attend only ten colleges. Nearly three-quarters of CPS graduates who attend college go to a two-year college or a nonselective four-year college. African-American college-goers were the least likely to attend selective or very selective colleges; Asian college-goers were the most likely to attend such colleges.

Few CPS graduates leave Illinois to attend college. Eighty-six percent of college-goers stayed in Illinois to continue their education. Asian and Latino graduates were the least likely to leave Illinois; African-American graduates were the most likely to leave, largely to attend Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). One-quarter of male African-American graduates and 19 percent of female African-American graduates attended college out of state.

Figure 1-2

Latino and male students are significantly less likely to enroll in college

2002 and 2003 CPS graduates enrolled in college by the spring after graduation



Differences in college-going rates across high schools

CPS high schools differ dramatically in the proportion of their students attending college, four-year colleges, and selective colleges. At the low end, seven of CPS's 74 high schools sent less than 35 percent of their graduates to college. At the high end, four CPS high schools sent more than 80 percent of their graduates to college. CPS has a few excellent high schools that send high proportions of graduates to college and to four-year and selective colleges. The performance of these top schools is driving the system average. While an average of 59 percent of CPS students attended college, more than 70 percent of high schools had college-going rates below that average. Most of the high schools that send a high proportion of their graduates to college and to four-year and selective colleges have admissions criteria, but a few neighborhood high schools and charter high schools also send a high proportion of their graduates to college and to four-year colleges.

CHAPTER TWO

How Qualifications Shape Chicago Public Schools Graduates' Access to College

Data on the college aspirations and college-going rates of CPS graduates reveal a significant gap between students' stated aspirations and their actual college-participation rates. What accounts for these trends? Chapter 2 focuses on how prepared CPS graduates are to attend four-year colleges, and particularly selective colleges. We examine ACT scores, GPAs, and participation in rigorous coursework (e.g., honors, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate).

CPS students graduate with very low ACT scores and GPAs

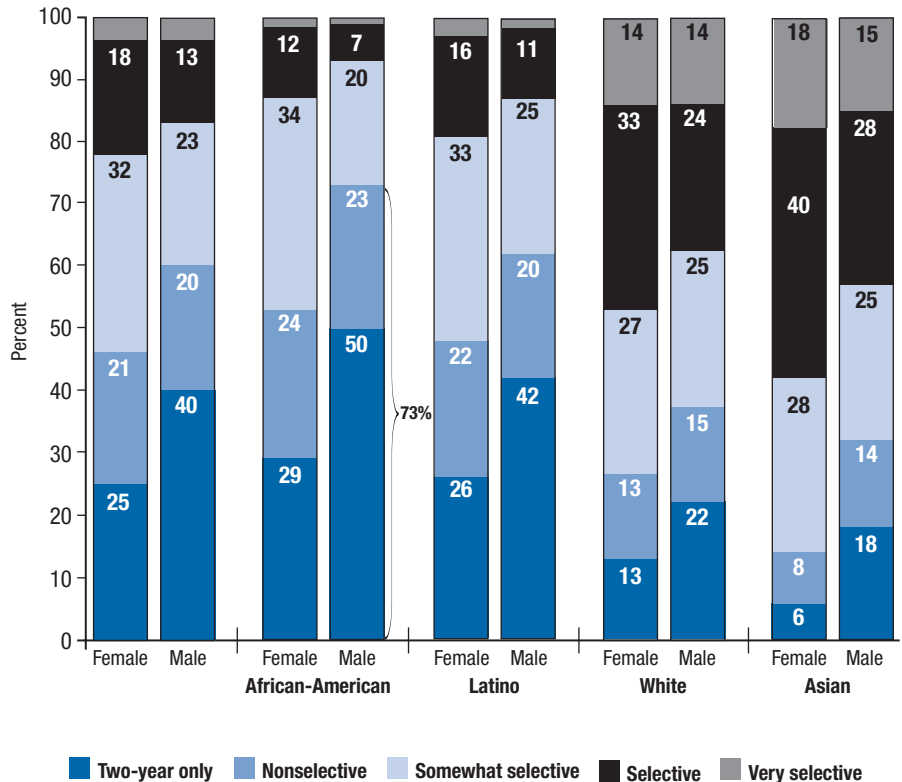
The average ACT score of CPS graduates is 17.1, compared to 20.2 for the entire state of Illinois. More than one-third of CPS graduates scored below a 14 on the ACT, placing them at approximately the 9th percentile of the national distribution. Nearly two-thirds of graduates scored a 17 or below. The ACT scores of African-American and Latino graduates are particularly troubling. Over 40 percent of Asian and white CPS graduates scored above the national average on the ACT, compared to only 9 percent of African-American graduates and only 13 percent of Latino graduates.

CPS students also graduate with low GPAs. Fully one-third of CPS graduates had less than a 2.0 unweighted GPA in their core classes and nearly 60 percent had less than a 2.5 GPA. Asian students were the most likely to excel in their courses. Fifty percent of Asian students graduated with a 3.0 or higher GPA in their core classes, compared to only 14

Figure 2-10

Nearly 75 percent of African-American male CPS alumni graduated with such low ACT scores and GPAs that they only had access to two-year or nonselective four-year colleges

College access categories for 2002 and 2003 CPS graduates by race/ethnicity and gender



Note: Graduates without transcript data, including graduates of charter schools, are not included. We combine students' GPA and ACT performance into a measure of the qualifications needed by CPS graduates to gain access to four-year colleges categorized by Barron's selectivity ratings.² Our rubric indicates the minimum GPAs and ACT scores that CPS graduates would need to have a good chance of being accepted to these types of schools based on the college-going patterns of their classmates with similar ACT scores and GPAs.³ Nonselective four-year colleges in Illinois include Northeastern Illinois University, Columbia College, and Roosevelt University. Somewhat selective colleges include several large public universities such as Chicago State University, Northern Illinois University, and Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. Selective colleges include the University of Illinois at Chicago, DePaul University, and Loyola University. Very selective colleges include the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the University of Chicago, and Northwestern University.

percent of African-American students and 20 percent of Latino students.

It is a myth that urban students in low-achieving schools graduate with high GPAs but low ACT scores. Instead, low GPAs and low ACT scores go together for students and schools. Only 2 percent of all CPS students graduated with high GPAs (greater than 3.5) but very low ACT scores (< 17). For most students, low ACT scores reflect low performance throughout high school. In more than half of high schools, at

least 40 percent of graduates had lower than a 2.0 unweighted GPA. Only 12 high schools had average unweighted GPAs above 2.4, and these are all high schools with high average ACT scores.

Male students are not performing well in high school. The ACT scores of male and female graduates do not differ dramatically, but male students had much lower GPAs than their female counterparts. Fully 45 percent of male versus 25 percent of female graduates had unweighted GPAs below 2.0 in their core classes. The gender gap was most pronounced among African-American graduates. Over half of male African-American students graduated with less than a 2.0 GPA in their core classes, and nearly three-quarters graduated with less than a 2.5 GPA. Female African-American students were more than twice as likely as their male counterparts (18 versus 8 percent) to graduate with a 3.0 or better GPA.

Low ACT scores and GPAs constrain access to four-year and selective four-year colleges

GPA matters a great deal in shaping CPS graduates' chances of attending college, four-year colleges, and selective or very selective colleges. GPA has a larger effect on graduates' probability of enrolling in college than ACT scores. Graduates have a similar probability of enrolling in college whether they have a very high ACT score or a very low ACT score. In contrast, graduates with very high GPAs are more than twice as likely to enroll in college as graduates with very low GPAs, even among graduates with similar ACT scores and demographic characteristics. Open admissions at two-year colleges and the availability of several local nonselective colleges that have very low admissions criteria mean that enrolling in college is an option for almost all students who graduate from high school. But low ACT scores and low GPAs present significant barriers to enrollment in four-year and selective colleges. Moreover, of the CPS graduates enrolled in four-year colleges, only those with very high GPAs (over 3.5) had more than a 50 percent probability of attending a selective or very selective college. Differences in GPAs between male and female graduates also largely explain the gender gap in college enrollment. It is male graduates' poor performance in high school coursework that explains their lower college-going rates.

More than half of CPS graduates leave high school with such

low ACT scores and GPAs that they would only be qualified to attend a two-year or nonselective four-year college. Only 20 percent of CPS graduates had GPAs and ACT scores that would qualify them for admittance to a selective or very selective college. White graduates were more than three times as likely as African-American graduates and twice as likely as Latino graduates to be qualified to attend such colleges. Nearly three-quarters of African-American males graduated with such low

GPA and ACT scores that they would likely be admitted to a two-year or nonselective four-year college.

Few high schools have students that graduate with access to four-year and selective colleges. In only 19 of 69 non-charter high schools were more than 50 percent of graduates qualified to attend the majority of four-year public universities in Illinois (at least a somewhat selective college). In only 14 of 69 non-charter high schools were more than 20 percent of graduates qualified to attend a selective four-year university such as the University of Illinois at Chicago. And few high schools in the city had graduates that were qualified to attend the state's best public college, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (a very selective college).

A preliminary look at the effect of honors, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate coursework

Research on college access has consistently found that students who take more advanced coursework in high school are more likely to attend college, less likely to be placed in remedial courses in college, and more likely to be successful in the colleges they attend.⁴ Over the past decade, CPS has been a national leader in raising graduation requirements to be aligned with minimum college admissions requirements and expanding opportunities to take more rigorous college-level courses and earn college credit to a wider range

It is male graduates' poor performance in high school coursework that explains their lower college-going rates.



of students. Most of the growth in college-level coursework has come through an expansion of Advanced Placement (AP) courses and an increase in the number of schools that offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program. In this report, we look at whether participation in these programs increases students' likelihood of attending college, independent of their prior achievement.

Despite the rapid expansion of the AP program in Chicago, the number of students who engaged in a more rigorous curricular program—one in which they were regularly enrolled in honors courses, took at least two AP courses, or were enrolled in the IB program—is quite limited. Only 9 percent of CPS graduates had sustained exposure to rigorous coursework that is explicitly intended to prepare students for college-level work. At about half of the 69 high schools for which we have transcript data, less than 10 percent of graduates took advanced coursework. Moreover, in only seven high schools did more than 30 percent of graduates take advanced coursework.

Students who take advanced coursework are more likely to attend selective or very selective colleges. Taking more advanced coursework is associated with an increase in the likelihood of enrolling in selective or very selective colleges, even among students with similar ACT test scores and grades. Increasing the number of CPS graduates who have access to selective colleges will require that high schools offer a sustained curriculum of rigorous coursework, particularly in schools whose students enter high school prepared to do more advanced work.

CHAPTER THREE

Graduation Rates of Chicago Public School Alumni in Four-year Colleges

Going to college is a significant milestone, yet if students do not remain in college and graduate, they will not obtain the full benefits of a college education. In this report we ask, how likely are CPS students who enroll in four-year colleges to graduate, and to what extent do high school performance and college choice shape their likelihood of completing a four-year degree? Using data from the CPS graduating classes of 1998 and 1999, we examine the extent to which

students who enrolled in a four-year college immediately after high school succeeded in obtaining a degree from a four-year college within six years.⁵

Graduation rates of CPS students

*Only 35 percent of CPS graduates who enrolled full-time in a four-year college in the year after high school graduated with a four-year degree within six years.*⁶ In Chapter 2 of this report, we showed that only about one-third of CPS graduates enroll in a four-year college within a year after high school graduation. Prior Consortium reports have shown that almost half of the students who enter a CPS high school never make it to graduation.⁷ If these statistics are aggregated, they suggest that only about 6 percent of CPS students earn a four-year college degree by the time they are in their mid-twenties.

CPS college graduation rates are low when compared to national rates. National estimates show that 64 percent of students who enter four-year colleges graduate within six years.⁸ Even if we account for the fact that CPS students are predominantly members of racial/ethnic minority groups, CPS students were less likely to graduate from four-year colleges within six years than their national counterparts. Nationally, 46 percent of African-American students and 47 percent of Latino students who began college in 1995 graduated in six years. In comparison, only about one-third of female African-American and Latino CPS graduates completed a four-year college degree within six years. Male African-American CPS graduates had the lowest college-completion rates, with just over one-fifth graduating within six years, while 28 percent of male Latinos graduated within six years.

High school preparation matters for college completion

GPA is the strongest predictor of college graduation. CPS students who graduated from high school with a GPA less than 3.0 were very unlikely to graduate from college. Slightly more than a quarter of the students with GPAs between 2.6 and 3.0 who enrolled in a four-year college graduated within six years, and much smaller percentages of students

with GPAs less than 2.5 graduated. On the other hand, more than 60 percent of students who graduated from high school with a 3.6 or higher GPA completed a four-year college degree within six years. Clearly, students who were not successful in their high school courses were unlikely to succeed in college.⁹

While high school grades are the best predictor of college graduation, high school course rigor and test scores also matter. The number of honors or AP courses a student took was associated with an increased likelihood of graduation, as were higher eleventh-grade test scores, though neither measure was as important as GPA. A high GPA alone, in the absence of evidence of skills attainment through standardized test scores or rigorous coursework, was also unlikely to translate into college graduation.

College choice matters for college completion

CPS students tend to enroll in a small number of colleges and universities. Among graduates who attended four-year colleges immediately after graduating high school, almost two-thirds attended just seven colleges (University of Illinois at Chicago, Northeastern Illinois University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Chicago State University, Northern Illinois University, Columbia College of Chicago, and Southern Illinois University at Carbondale). One implication of this attendance pattern is that CPS graduates are concentrated in local colleges that have very low graduation rates, even when compared to schools with similar selectivity. In this report we find that the low graduation rates at the colleges most frequently attended by CPS graduates cannot be explained by the fact that less-qualified graduates attend these institutions. Quite simply, CPS students who went to college someplace other than Northeastern Illinois University, Southern Illinois University, Chicago State University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, University of Illinois at Chicago, and Columbia College of Chicago—the most popular schools—were more likely to graduate than CPS alumni who attended the most popular colleges, even if those students had similar academic preparation and backgrounds.

Figure 3-12 (see page 8) demonstrates several of the key

findings in this report about college graduation. First, students with very low GPAs were unlikely to graduate, regardless of which college they attended. Students with poor high school grades—about a C average—did not go to a wide range of colleges, but regardless of where they attended college, less than one-fifth graduated. Students with a high school GPA of about 2.5 attended a broader range of colleges, but less than one-third graduated at any college. Second, regardless of the college, high school grades mattered. At even the top schools attended by CPS graduates, high school GPA was strongly predictive of college graduation. This suggests, once again, that GPA was not only important in gaining admission to more-selective schools, but also was a good indicator of students' likelihood of success once there. Finally, this chart suggests that college choice mattered substantially for graduation, especially among high-achieving students who had the most options for attending different colleges.

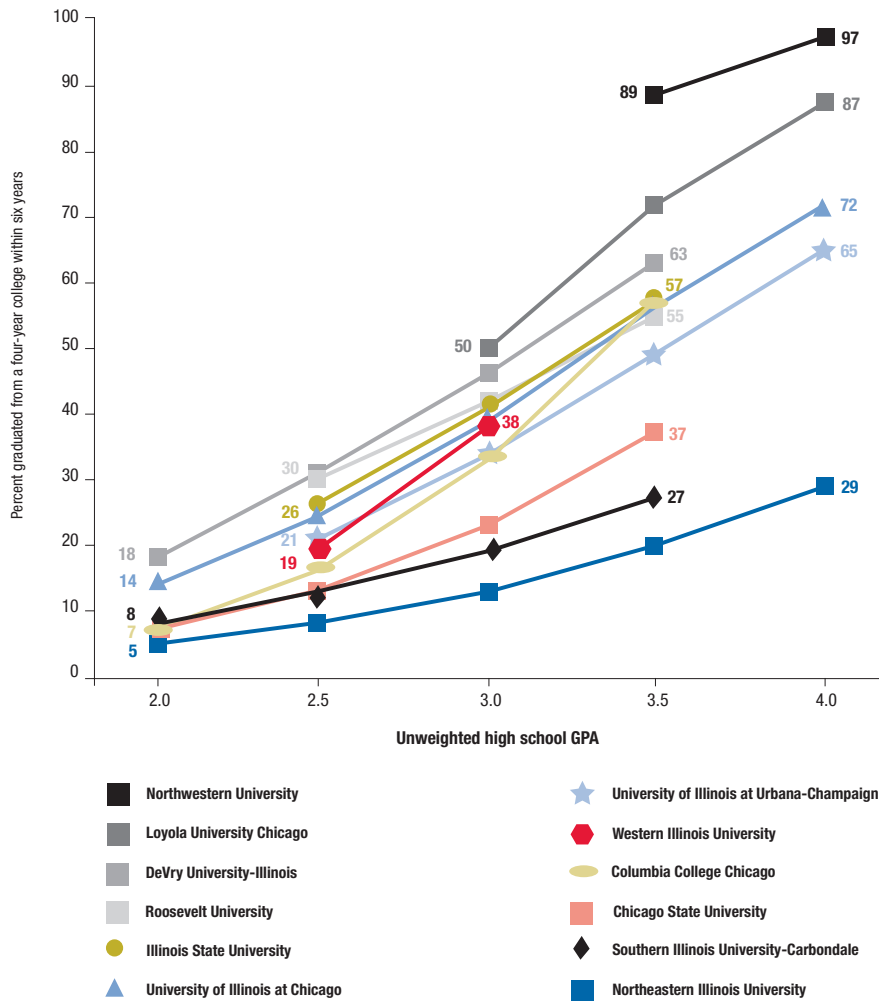
CONCLUSION

Despite trends of increasing college aspirations and rising entering achievement test scores, the gap between high school students' aspirations to attend college and their actual college participation and degree attainment remains large, as is so vividly documented in this report. The central question for high school reform, then, is this: What needs to change in order for high schools to close this gap? The Consortium on Chicago School Research's research project on the post-secondary experiences of Chicago graduates will focus on this question over the next several years. In this first report, we highlight five policy-relevant areas that our research suggests are critical.

1. The low GPAs and ACT scores of Chicago students are constraining their access to college and are seriously undermining their chances of being successful once enrolled. The focus of high school reform must be on ensuring that students have access to four-year colleges and are successful once there. In this era of accountability, Chicago high schools are focused on test scores. Little attention has been paid to grades. We found that grades are a central determinant of college access and completion. Stu-

Figure 3-12

There are large differences in graduation rates by college, especially among students with strong high school GPAs
 College graduation rates by unweighted high school GPA for popular Illinois colleges



Note: These lines come from logistic regression models performed for each college, predicting graduation with GPA. The regression lines are based on data from all students at each college based on their actual (not rounded) GPA. However, points are included on the graph for a college only if at least 20 students at that college had a rounded high school GPA at that point. Colleges that enrolled fewer than 40 CPS alumni, such as the University of Chicago, are not shown to protect student confidentiality. Several colleges that were shown in Figure 3-9 are not shown in Figure 3-12 because almost all CPS students at those colleges had the same rounded GPA, so it was not possible to discern the GPA-graduation relationship among CPS students at those schools.

cannot expect that students **with consistent patterns of poor performance** in their high school courses will **perform well** in their college classes. Students who have focused on **passing**, rather than **succeeding** in, their classes have not developed the kinds of **study skills, effort, and mastery** of material that they will need to handle new academic demands in college. GPA is not just important in predicting college access and performance, it is equally important in explaining a key difference we observe in student outcomes in CPS: the higher college participation and completion rates of female students compared to male students.

The fact that male students are struggling in CPS high schools is not news: a recent Consortium report on high school completion identified the high dropout rates among male students as a particular concern.¹⁰ This report further discovers that those male students who survive to graduation, particularly African-American and Latino male students, also appear to be disengaged from and struggling in CPS high schools, as can be seen in the difference in their average GPAs. This must be a wake up call to our high schools. It is clear that high schools must begin to take seriously the extent to which high school and classroom environments are working to engage young men in their

students who leave CPS with average GPAs lower than 3.0 are very unlikely to graduate from college. Unfortunately, few CPS students graduate from high school with such high GPAs. The low graduation rates of CPS students from four-year colleges, then, should come as no surprise. We

schooling and learning and are providing high levels of academic expectations and support for males. This is not a call for grade inflation. Good grades without skills will not help. Test preparation strategies that increase test scores without developing students' **skills will not help either.**

2. Coursework matters, particularly in shaping access to more selective colleges among CPS students. Yet, despite significant investments in expanding Advanced Placement and advanced coursework, most schools in CPS lag behind. Perhaps the most consistent finding in research that examines the effects of high school preparation on college outcomes is that students who take more rigorous courses in high school have higher test scores, are less likely to be placed in remedial college courses, and are more likely to graduate from college. Our own analysis largely confirms these results. We do not know the extent to which students in these advanced courses would have been more motivated and oriented toward college than students not in these courses to begin with. Our results are preliminary, but they suggest that investments in increasing the rigor of students' coursework may pay off. The expansion of AP and more rigorous college-oriented programs of study has not been evenly distributed across our high schools. In some high schools, impressive numbers of students are being engaged in more rigorous coursework, including sequences of honors and AP courses, but this is not the norm. In many high schools, few students have access to rigorous programs of study, and therefore few CPS graduates have sustained exposure to rigorous coursework.

3. The impressive performance of a few high schools is driving system averages. The majority of CPS high schools are not up to standards in their course offerings and in the levels of preparation of even their top students. In recent discussions of Chicago public high schools, CEO Arne Duncan has consistently emphasized that CPS has some excellent high schools, and we found that the high college-participation rates and excellent performance of these schools, including some neighborhood high schools, currently drive the system average. On average, 20 percent of CPS students leave high school with the GPAs and ACT scores they will need to attend selective colleges, such as University of Illinois at Chicago and DePaul University. However, half of these well-prepared students come from only five high schools. Most high schools are simply not up to standards in producing graduates ready for college. Thus, if students are not lucky enough to attend one of

the top schools in the city, they appear to have little chance of graduating with access to a selective college or with the GPAs, test scores, and coursework that would predict that they will be successful in college once enrolled.

4. High schools must pay attention to guidance and support if students are to translate qualifications into college enrollment. Latino students in CPS are much less likely to attend college, even when compared students with similar grades and achievement test scores. A recent Consortium report found that increasing numbers of Latino students in CPS are graduating from high school. Latino students are also aspiring to college, and their parents share those aspirations. Thus, the lower college enrollment rates of Latino CPS students compared to similarly prepared graduates cannot be fully explained by a difference in aspirations. Why is this? This question is not resolved in this

report, and we will pursue its answer throughout this project. These findings do suggest an important role for high schools in making sure that Latino students are getting information, guidance, and concrete support to attend college, though the importance of guidance is not limited to the Latino population. There are many high schools in CPS where we see a significant gap between the proportion of students who go to college and the proportion of students who have the qualifications to attend somewhat selective or more selective four-year colleges. Thus, as CPS works to increase their graduates' qualifications, there must be an equivalent attempt to ensure that students are searching for and aspiring to colleges that demand those qualifications and that students are getting the concrete supports they will need to translate those qualifications into college access.

Coursework matters, particularly in shaping access to more selective colleges among CPS students

5. College choice matters, especially among students prepared to do college-level work. CPS students are concentrated in a small number of local institutions with lower-than-average graduation rates. These low graduation rates are not explained by the fact that CPS's least-prepared alumni attend these schools. This report is a first look at college graduation outcomes for CPS students, and we do not know what is causing that result. These large differences in graduation rates across colleges, however, suggest that high schools need to pay attention to where their students are going to college and students' performance once they are there. Even students graduating with strong high school academic records are unlikely to graduate from some of the most popular local universities. Why these students are failing to graduate should be of utmost concern to both CPS and the postsecondary institutions. For these students, high school preparation is not the reason for low graduation rates. One way to increase students' chances of success in college is to ensure that they are better prepared to handle college-level work. Another way is to encourage students to attend colleges that offer high levels of support and environments conducive to student learning, particularly for underrepresented minorities.

Concluding comments

The rising aspirations of today's students create an enormous opportunity for high schools in Chicago and across the nation. While promising, these changes also create an entirely new set of demands on high school communities and educators, demands that only the most selective high schools have previously been expected to meet. Meeting these expectations will require building instructional environments that provide strong structures of support and guidance, while engaging students in a set of academic experiences that will build their skills and allow them to translate aspirations into achievement. This opportunity is also a daunting challenge. A first step in facing such a challenge is for educators and high school communities to begin to see postsecondary preparation and participation as a critical goal, but fully addressing it requires much more. It requires that we develop a better understanding of the determinants of students' postsecondary success and the

indicators that need to improve if students' college access and college graduation rates are to improve.

The purpose of this report is to provide a baseline for this effort. In this report, we focus largely on the extent to which students' qualifications shape their college access and success. In the end, we agree with the conclusion that William Bowen, Martin Kurzweil, and Eugene Tobin came to in their larger-scale analysis of the determinants

A first step in facing such a challenge is for educators and high school communities to begin to see postsecondary preparation and participation as a critical goal ...

of college access and performance among low income and minority students: increasing qualifications is the single most important strategy to improve college participation rates, access to the most selective colleges, and college graduation rates of low-income, minority, and first-generation college students.¹¹ Unfortunately, in Chicago, the gap between the qualifications students will need and their current levels of performance is wide and must be the central focus of reform.

Our analysis also suggests that colleges are not absolved of responsibility for low graduation rates, nor can high schools simply assume that if students are qualified and want to go to college that they will be able to effectively manage the college application, search, and selection process. We will follow up on both of these issues more rigorously in subsequent reports. In the meantime, we hope that this report will allow high school communities to engage in discussion of not only what it will take to increase students' qualifications, but what kinds of colleges they would like their students to be qualified for, and what colleges may best meet the needs of their diverse student bodies.

Endnotes

¹ The enrollment rates reported here differ slightly from those reported by the Department of Postsecondary Education because throughout this report, we report how many CPS students make the transition to college by the May following graduation from high school, not just by the fall after graduation. In addition, we do not report numbers for students who enrolled in a special education program or who graduated from alternative high schools.

² One of the most popular ways to rate colleges is by national college rankings. We group four-year colleges into four separate categories based on the ratings system used by the *Barron's Profile of American Colleges*, which ranks colleges by the proportion of applicants admitted and by the overall achievement level of the entering class as measured by high school GPA, class rank, and test scores. Our top category, very selective, combines Barron's top two categories (very and highly competitive).

³ We identified cutoffs for each qualification category by identifying descriptively the modal college attendance patterns of CPS graduates with different GPA and ACT combinations. Because this rubric reflects general patterns of college-going, some CPS graduates with ACT scores and GPAs that place them in a particular category enroll in a more selective college than indicated by their qualifications. The numbers also roughly align with the admissions requirements of in-state public universities: nonselective Northeastern Illinois University requires students to score at least a 19 on the ACT or be in the top half of their graduating class; somewhat-selective Chicago State University requires an ACT score of 18 and a 2.5 GPA; selective University of Illinois at Chicago does not post minimum requirements but the entering class of 2005 had an average ACT of 23 and GPA of 2.75; more than 90 percent of 2005 admitted students at the very selective University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign scored at least a 23 on the ACT, and 80 percent were in the top 25 percent of their graduating class.

⁴ ACT, Inc., *Crisis at the core: Preparing all students for college and work*. (Iowa City, Iowa: Author, 2004); James E. Rosenbaum, "It's time to tell the kids: If you don't do well in high school, you won't do well in college (or on the job)," *American Educator* (Spring, 2004); Patte Barth, "A common core curriculum for the new century," *Thinking K-16*, 7, no. 1 (2003): 3-19; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, *Answers in the tool box: Academic intensity, attendance patterns, and bachelor's degree attainment*, Clifford Adelman (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, 1999); U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Confronting the odds: Students at risk and the pipeline to higher education*, NCES 98-094, Laura Horn (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997); U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Bridging the gap: Academic preparation and postsecondary success of first-generation students*, NCES 2001-153, Edward C. Warburton, Rosio Bugarin, and Anne-Marie Nuñez (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2001).

⁵ The graduation rates presented in this report could be considered either an underestimate or an overestimate of total graduation rates, depending on the group of students considered for inclusion. Because we only look at six years after high school graduation, we slightly underestimate the proportion of CPS graduates who ultimately get a degree. At the same time, this is a best case scenario in that we only look at students who enrolled in a four-year college full-time by the spring after high school. Even though they may have had the intention of obtaining a four-year degree within six years, we did not consider students who delayed enrollment in college by more than a year, those who began college as part-time students, or those who enrolled in a two-year college—unless they transferred to a four-year college within their first year.

⁶ This percentage only includes the students for which we have graduation information (5,492 students). Students who transferred from their original college and graduated from a different four-year college for which we have graduation information are counted as graduates. Students who transferred from their original college and enrolled in a college that does not report graduation information to the NSC were removed from the analysis, regardless of whether they returned to their original school, graduated, or remained at the second school. If we included students who enrolled in the spring semester after high school graduation (for a total of 5,601 students), the college graduation rate for CPS students would be 34 percent. The completion rate among students who began in the spring semester is much lower (21 percent), but because few students begin a four-year college in the spring semester (just 4 percent of the total beginning within a year after high school) their inclusion does not substantially affect the overall graduation rate.

⁷ Of the students who began high school in 1994 and did not transfer out of CPS, 48 percent graduated by 1998. An additional 5 percent graduated the following year, making the total high school graduation rate 53 percent. See Elaine Allensworth, *Graduation and dropout trends in Chicago: A look at cohorts of students from 1991 to 2004*, (Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago, 2005).

⁸ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Descriptive Summary of 1995-96 beginning postsecondary students: Six years later*, NCES 2003-151, Lutz Berkner, Shirley He, and Emily F. Cataldi. Paula Knepper (project officer) (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002).

⁹ The GPA-graduation relationship was consistent regardless of the high school that students attended.

¹⁰ Elaine Allensworth, *Graduation and dropout trends in Chicago: A look at cohorts of students from 1991 to 2004*, (Chicago: Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago, 2005).

¹¹ William G. Bowen, Martin A. Kurzweil, and Eugene M. Tobin, *Equity and Excellence in American Higher Education*, (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 2005).

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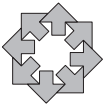
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